

Testimony for the House Judiciary Committee in Opposition of House Bills (HBs) 4450-53

May 23, 2023

My name is Jeannine Lyons-Hamilton, and I am writing to you in opposition of House Bills 4450-53. I am a daughter of a domestic violence victim/survivor. I have witnessed many traumatic experiences during my adolescence. My mother endured emotional and physical abuse for many years at the hands of my biological father. Like many victims, she was too scared to leave. Abusers whittle down your sense of self and make you believe you don't deserve more and warp your reality so you will never leave.

Once my mother filed for divorce my father became even more angry and abusive. He would threaten her and tell her he'd kill her if she went through with the divorce. It became more prevalent as the divorce proceeding went on. My father would knock my mother to the floor to hit her and he wouldn't stop, even when I laid my body across hers to stop the blows. It was my reality for years as I watched my mother be brave and act like nothing was wrong to take care of me and my little sister.

In 1995, as the divorce proceedings started to near the end, my father became angry and started grabbing picture frames from the walls and smashing them into the ground. He broke a glass table. My mom ran to me, told me to take my sister and keep her safe. My mother calmly asked me to grab as many clothes as possible and run to the car. My father walked into the house from the garage as I was rushing to pack. He was holding a gas can and that's when my normally calm mother screamed, "JEANNINE!!! PLEASE GRAB THE GAS CAN AND THROW IT INTO THE LAKE!" I quickly grabbed it out of his hands and ran to throw it into the lake. I then ran to the car, and buckled my sister into the backseat with our belongings and I started the car. My mother ran to us as my dad ran after her. We sped off to find a police station to tell them what happened. My mother tearfully explained how my father attacked her and was trying to pour gasoline on her and our home to light us on fire. He wasn't going to let us live if he couldn't keep us for himself. The police went to our home that night to question him. Like many abusers, he talked them out of believing us and he was unscathed from the event.

We moved into my grandmother's home for nine months. Once the divorce was officially finalized my mother was able to move us back into the home. My father would break into the house and leave us notes so he could prove to us that he could get to us if he wanted. After some time passed, she had my father over to discuss selling our family home. My father was very much against this idea and grew angry. Selling the house would provide a way to be untethered from him. She called a friend. He grabbed the phone and slapped her across the face and hung up the phone. Fearing something was wrong, her friend called the police. They came immediately and saw the abuse across her face. Finally, they handcuffed him and he went to jail. My mother was relieved but had no information on how long he'd be in jail. In the middle of the night my father's friend knocked on our door at 2 am to ask what happened. My mother told him everything and my father's friend was shocked and frantically urged us to leave our home again as my father called him for bail money, and he just paid it. My mother had no idea there was bail set for my father, how long he'd be in jail, or what would happen next. If it weren't for my father's friend rushing to my mother, we wouldn't have had the warning that he was on the way to us. We fled from our home to safety.

The events above happened 18 years ago, and since that day I've always had to look over my shoulder. To this day, he stalks me at my home and work. I've had personal protection orders, the police in my town are on speed dial. I've lived with this my entire life, and in turn it is my life's purpose to ensure sure domestic violence survivors have a fighting chance. I'm writing to you today to urge you to please protect domestic abuse survivors and victims. Please find a way to incorporate these brave individuals into legislative to keep them safe, aware, and empowered. House Bills 4450-53 would allow perpetrators of domestic violence, like my father, early release from prison and impede the time given to victims to feel safe, heal and prepare and implement a safety plan.

Thank you for your consideration,
Jeannine Lyons-Hamilton